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ABSTRACT

Staff morale is part of all aspects of the camp operation. Six components of camp operation are reviewed in terms of how they affect staff morale. They include: scheduling, training, food, facilities, staffing pattern and program. Each of these aspects is presented in terms of physical needs, or emotional needs, or the subtle, underlying ideas that mirror the camp philosophy. (JD)

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"JUST SAY YES TO GREAT STAFF MORALE"

Program Description: Do you find times when your staff members morale needs a boost and you're out of ideas? Discover new and practical ideas on events large and small that are bound to give all involved a boost. How to focus and provide support for staff members so they feel positive about their experience. Issues addressed will include how to focus attitudes, morale building in staff training and self-esteem building for staff members.

I. Introduction

Staff morale is a part of all aspects of the camp operation. Six components of camp operation will be reviewed in terms of how they effect staff morale. The six components include: scheduling, training, food, facilities, staffing pattern and program. Each of these aspects will be presented in terms of physical needs or concrete ideas and emotional needs or the subtle, underlying ideas that mirror the camp philosophy.

II. Scheduling

Physical considerations:

A. Staff Parent Day

Realizing that may staff need/appreciate the support of their parents and families, organizing a special day where parents can visit camp, meet their son/daughter's co-workers, and take in part of the camp activities, can make a positive impact on staff morale.

Corsages and invitations can make the day special for visitors.

B. Mid-summer Break

It's important to schedule, when possible, and extended break longer than the required 24 hours. July 4th can be an excellent time as many staff have family gatherings which they could attend. It provides the Director with a break as well.

C. Alter Session Lengths

Providing staff with a flexible schedule in terms of days on and days off duty, can allow staff opportunities to complete personal business (i.e. interviewing for fall jobs, apartment hunting, business transactions).

Emotional considerations:

A. Theme for Summer

Offering a theme for the summer based upon a current song (i.e. James Taylor's "You've Got a Friend") provides continuity and focus for the staff. The theme song can be played at special events (dances, etc.), used for public relations, bulletin boards, buttons, etc.

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B. Weekly Talks

Weekly talks for the staff provide an opportunity to weave in the summer theme on a weekly basis. The talk is based upon the administrators observations of the weeks events and is generic enough to apply to all staff members (i.e. "Be confident, you are a successful person.") Utilizing the theme, the administrator can help the staff to build a temporary "home" and "family" at the camp.

C. Staff Meetings

At the end of each week a brief meeting between supervisor and staff member helps to keep communication lines open. The meeting is scheduled to summarize and informally evaluate the week and provide support and encouragement for the upcoming week.

III. Training

Physical Considerations:

A. Pre-camp training break

Provide a free night during training with either off-camp or on-camp options for staff to do as they please. Plan activities if necessary, i.e. a pizza party in town or provide an activity at camp that may serve as a culmination of the successes of the training week thus far.

B. Pre-camp training awards

Awards that point out the highlights of training week are reminders of the fun things that happened to serve to boost morale at the end of training week (i.e. Archery bullseye Club; Homerun King, Loudest Snorer).

C. On-going training per evaluations

Utilize staff performance and program evaluations to establish training needs on an on-going basis throughout the summer. Staff who have had successes in the areas where weaknesses were noted are encouraged to share their successes.

Emotional considerations:

A. Families

Groups of six to seven staff members are assigned to a "family" during staff training. Old and new staff as well as kitchen staff, maintenance , etc. are mixed into various groups. These families engage in get to know you exercises throughout the week (i.e. new games, etc.).

B. Breakfast Club

A different group of six to seven staff members are assigned to a breakfast club group for staff training. These individuals meet for breakfast each morning and discuss a question pertinent to the camper population (i.e. How do you view the mentally retarded individual?). Special setting such as tablecloths and candles help create a stimulating environment.

C. Mid-summer Inservice

In mid-summer staff members brainstorm a variety of topics they need to know more about to be more effective in their job. The topics are assigned to various veteran staff members who have some expertise in these areas (i.e. sign language, behavior management). These staff members become the "facilitator" who compile resources and keep discussion lively in the topic area. Staff members are free to move from one discussion to another for an alotted block of time.

IV. Food

Physical considerations:

A. Staff Parties

Offer one weekly party or special staff treat built around a theme including invitations, decorations, food and activities. It may be necessary to divide staff into groups in order to accommodate all staff without taking away from camper coverage. Mixing staff groups also allows for socialization and increased staff comoradeire.
Examples include: Tropical Paradise
Omelette Shoppe

B. Banquets

Utilize a committee of staff to assist in the planning of a banquet at the end of pre-camp training and/or at summer's end. Provide a special meal (not prepared by kitchen staff) preferably served at another place other than the dining hall. Include invitations, decorations, and awards.

Emotional considerations:

A. Choices are important

Choices make a difference in a staff member's life. An example of this: A Camp Director decided to institute a wellness program in the camp. He purged the camp of anything that looked "unhealthy" (pop machines, etc.) Everyone was caught up in his enthusiasm for the new wellness program until one day he found a staff member under a table eating a candy bar. So much for choices.

B. Beginning Meal

Beginning each session with a staff meal is important for staff morale. Families and communities often meet together to share experiences and common food. Staff members sharing a common beginning meal helps to build a "family" feeling.

V. Facilities

Physical considerations:

A. Staff House

Provide a room, building or some area where staff can unwind away from campers without fear of interruption. Try to include a refrigerator, stove, food and if possible games, newspapers, TV/VCR for movies.

B. Resource Areas

Provide access to library, prop room, art supplies, etc. that will allow staff an easy way to add creative programming to camper activities.

C. Program Facilities

Provide access to camp program areas such as waterfront, art center, etc. Be sure to set rules for use by staff and be prepared to enforce them. This is especially true with regard to the waterfront.

Emotional considerations:

A. Home-like Environment

Encouraging staff members to create a home-like environment can effect staff morale. Providing quilts or arts and crafts supplies for staff member encourages creation of a home-like environment.

B. Brainstorming

Brainstorm on and off camp free time options with staff members. Post these ideas in a central area and add to them throughout the season.

VI. Staffing Pattern

Physical considerations

A. Responsibility Rotation

Allow staff the opportunity to rotate when possible into different areas of responsibility (i.e. Staff Switch Day; Provide tripping opportunities to support staff.)

B. Respite Care

Provide relief staff whose primary responsibility is to serve as a support and resource person for the counselors. In addition, this person can provide necessary on-going evaluation of the counselors.

C. Camper/Counselor Ratio

Setting and maintaining recommended camper/counselor ratios ensures staff are not carrying too heavy of a work load. Build in support from form other staff as needed to provide proper coverage for breaks and time off.

Emotional considerations:

A. Conferences

It is important to continue to ask staff members, "How can we make your life better"? and to provide feedback on performance. To accomplish this goal conferences are scheduled three times throughout the summer. Three weeks into the season groups of four staff are formed to meet with the administrator's to identify goals, etc. The mid-summer conference is a self-evaluation and provides staff members an opportunity to examine their own needs and performance. The final conference provides a time for the administrators to summarize performance and provide a reference for future employment.

B. Week Vacation

Hiring extra staff members for the seasons allows each staff member a vacation week. Staff members draw their week off in a fair lottery but can switch weeks. Beginning and ending the season with all staff members on camp helps build community.

VII. Program

Physical considerations

A. "Everybody Special"

In this program, staff offer to share with the campers a special skill or talent not a part the normal camp program. (i.e. sign language, french braiding, cheerleading, hacky-sack, guitar) Staff not only feel good about sharing but are reinforced by the positive impact their sharing has on the campers.

B. Tie Dye Saturday

Provide materials on a day off for staff to make a special project.

C. Staff Car Wash

This is a planned activity on a weekend in town to raise money for staff special projects (awards, banquet, campership, etc.)

Emotional considerations

A. Secret Friends

During one week in the middle of the season staff members draw names and acquire a "secret friend" for the week. The secret friend does small things for the staff member such as gives small gifts, places notes in mailboxes, etc.

B. Word of the Day

The word of the day is chosen by a staff member and posted in the main meeting area each day. Examples of word of the day include: "excitement", "rejuvenate", "hot", etc.

C. Just Say "No" to Gossip

Communities typically have a problem with gossip. A campaign such as "Just Say 'No' to Gossip" can be instigated and items such as buttons made to remind staff members to "Just say no to gossip". This campaign can also be used as a fun theme for a week during the season.

Summary

It's not the big things that are done but the little things that effect staff morale. Paying attention to people in their environment makes the difference.

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